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ABSTRACT

This bulletin focuses on adult compacts, three-way agreements among employers, potential employees, and trainers to provide the right kind of quality training to meet the employers' requirements. Part 1 is an executive summary of a report of the Adult Compacts Project, which studied three adult compacts in Birmingham and Loughborough, England, and Boston, Massachusetts. It reports these findings: adult compacts are an appropriate and useful approach to cooperative training design and delivery and emphasis is, and should be, on preparing individuals for a rapidly changing work environment. Part 2 provides guidelines for the development of adult compacts in the form of a checklist with these topics: economic context, local labor market, employer involvement, size of employers, approach to employers, audit of existing college links, negotiation and the compact, compact agreement, duration of training, location of training, work placements, vocational qualifications, recruitment, guidance and counseling, finance, and training for employment. Part 3 contains detailed conclusions of the research project regarding the effectiveness of adult compacts as an approach to training, adult compacts and the economic environment, the role of job guarantee, training for employment, and principal features of an adult compact. Three model statements of intent are then provided that define the respective undertakings of the employer, trainee, and trainer in the compact. (YLB)

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Adult compacts are an arrangement between an employer and a potential adult employee that employment may be available provided certain conditions are met.

It is of course becoming fairly conventional for employers to collaborate in training design and there have been a number of examples of funded programmes (ET, customised training) in which this has taken place.

The adult compact is one example of a suitable model but has special emphases. Conventionally, it is a three-way agreement between employer, potential employee and trainer to provide the right kind of quality training to meet the employer's requirements. The need of the trainee to be offered broad-based training to prepare him or her for a range of opportunities over a period of time are also respected in the compact arrangements. Employer and employee needs are thus dovetailed in the compact, and the broker (or joiner) in this arrangement is the designer and provider of training.

Providers of training therefore have a key function in compact arrangements as specialists but also as advocates and negotiators.

Compacts rarely guarantee employment (except in certain conditions like high unemployment, skill shortages and areas of untapped potential) but can be instrumental in increasing employability and confidence in trainees, improving employers' perceptions of unemployed people and giving a significant new role to the providers of training.

FEU is grateful to Neil Orrock and Loughborough College for conducting the research. This bulletin contains an executive summary of the work, a development checklist, the detailed conclusions and three model statements of intent which define the respective undertakings of the employer, trainee and trainer in the compact.

Martin C. Johnson

The compact

The compact is a tripartite relationship between the employer, the individual seeking to return to work and the provider. The relationship is a co-operative one based on goodwill and the term 'compact' is not intended to imply a binding agreement, legal or otherwise. The nature of each party's commitments and responsibilities is outlined in the Statements of Intent (pp6-8).

ADULT COMPACTS

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The link between the Adult Compact Project

The apparent success of the Boston Compact (see below) and the growth of school compacts in a number of English cities, have resulted in growing interest in the feasibility of transferring the model to the adult sector.

Current and continuing changes in the supply and demand sides of the labour market are conducive to the development of adult compacts. In particular, in the light of declining numbers of young people, there is an increasing awareness amongst employers that they must tilt their recruitment towards older people who are seeking to return to work.

Three adult compacts

Three adult compacts reflecting three different economic environments are examined in the full report. The compacts are focused on particular companies and have achieved a high level of programme completion, final job placement and eventual retention rate. The first is based in Birmingham and is involved with training long-term unemployed people for semi-skilled engineering work in the car industry.

Project Healthcare is a compact in Boston, Massachusetts, based in fourteen city hospitals. Training is for a variety of 'entry-level' jobs and there is a guarantee of employment at the end of an eight-week programme. In addition, though, the arrangement includes an 'upgrade' programme for existing hospital staff who already occupy entry-level jobs. There is an emphasis on long-term career development for all employees.

The Loughborough Adult Compact concentrates on training for office, general clerical and secretarial work. The arrangement is based on a consortium of employers in the area, each of which negotiates their own relationship to the compact.

The case studies

The case studies demonstrate that adult compacts are an appropriate and useful approach to co-operative training design and delivery.

The three models are alike in terms of close co-operation with employers, the emphasis on local skills shortage areas, and the relatively short duration of training. A short period of training, with clear end-goals, will be more motivating

than a lengthy programme which distances the individual from completion.

There is also an emphasis, in each case, on preparing individuals for a rapidly changing work environment.

On the other hand, the case studies differ with regard to the occupational sector (whether the focus is on a single employer or a consortium) and the nature of the compact relationship.

The differences between the three case studies are related to the differing economic environments in which the arrangements have developed. There are three significant variables which will largely determine the form an adult compact takes. These are the homogeneity of local industry, the size of local employers, and the nature of the local labour market.

General conclusions

Adult compacts are a valuable and practical option, with a number of strengths, that can operate effectively in different economic environments.

Adult compacts should be concerned with enhancing the long-term employability of individuals, by fostering their effective autonomy, rather than concentrating on jobs alone.

A model of an adult compact can be derived from an examination of the three case studies. A number of significant features are common to each; these include an emphasis on a clear and negotiated relationship, a concern with longer-term employability of compact graduates and a responsiveness to the local context.

Guidelines

Guidelines for the development of adult compacts are provided in the form of a checklist.

A DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

● Economic context

There must be an appreciation of the nature of the local economy in terms of the size of organisations, the range of industries, etc.

● Local labour market

There must be a clear overview of the state of the local labour market, both the demand and supply sides.

● **Employer involvement**

Local employers must be involved from the outset, both to enlist their support and guidance and to help fine tune an understanding of the economic and labour market context.

● **Size of employers**

It is advantageous to concentrate on involving larger employers with established personnel and training staff.

● **Approach to employers**

The initial approach to an employer should be made at a senior level. If the employer then participates this ensures a commitment at lower level.

● **Audit of existing college links**

Colleges will already have contact with large numbers of local employers, especially via management advisory committees. A college-wide audit of such links might be a helpful preliminary to formal contract.

● **Negotiation and the compact**

There will only be a sense of commitment from employers and individuals where they feel that they have been able to determine their role: it is vital that the participants feel they can negotiate their rights and responsibilities within the agreement.

● **The compact agreement**

The compact agreement should be clearly defined. A contract is inappropriate but Statements of Intent, which can be drawn up to reflect each party's role, are a helpful way of formalising the agreement.

● **Duration of training**

Experience gleaned from the case studies suggests that shorter programmes of training are likely to enhance the motivation of trainees. Clearly though, consideration must be given to the training needs of particular occupational areas.

● **Location of training**

Careful thought must be given to the location of training. In some cases at least, both employers and individuals strongly favour off-the-job arrangements.

● **Work placements**

Work placements are, nevertheless, valuable in building confidence and providing the opportunity for trainees to gain relevant and up-to-date references. There must, however, be preparation and support for people who may not have entered a work environment for many years.

● **Vocational qualifications**

Wherever possible learning achievements should be

accredited via nationally recognised vocational qualifications.

● **Recruitment**

Recruitment must be tackled in a sensitive way. If a programme of training demands a certain standard of basic skills, then those who are ill-prepared should be deflected to appropriate provision and not allowed to embark upon an experience which will result in failure. Where a programme of training is closely aligned with the needs of a particular organisation, it is important that the employer is involved in the process of selection.

● **Guidance and counselling**

In common with all provision for the unemployed, there must be sufficient resources for guidance and counselling. This is especially important given the potential significance of prior learning in compact training.

● **Finance**

Careful thought must be given to the funding of adult compacts. It can be seen from the case studies that training can be supported via the Employment Training (ET) scheme, or sometimes from pockets of monies that local authorities have earmarked for provision for the unemployed. It must be remembered, though, that there can be considerable development costs during the early stages.

● **Training for employment**

Perhaps most importantly there is a need to remember the overarching aims of the adult compacts. The approach is feasible, and makes sense, providing the long-term, as well as short-term, outcomes are satisfactory to both employers, and individuals seeking to return to work.

THE COMPACTS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Adult compacts: an approach to training

Anyone who is considering setting up an adult compact will first want to ask whether such arrangements are feasible. The three case studies which have been examined suggest that this approach is not only practicable but it may offer particular strengths. Thus, there is evidence that compacts can effectively motivate unemployed people, as indicated both by the statistical evidence of a high completion rate and anecdotal evidence from tutors of the enthusiasm that participation in a compact can generate. Furthermore, employers have generally been more than just receptive to the concept of adult compacts; there has been great enthusiasm and in most cases, a willingness not only to participate but to be seen to be an active partner in the arrangement. There is every indication that employers who

have been involved are keen to maintain and strengthen their commitment to adult compacts.

With regard to final employment, while it is too early to assess two of the compacts reviewed, the Birmingham compacts have clearly been very successful. Just as significant is the high retention rate for compact graduates who have been employed in relation to conventionally recruited staff, implying a satisfactory outcome for both the individual and the employer.

It is argued in the full report that recent changes in the supply and demand sides of the labour market are particularly conducive to the establishment of adult compacts. At present, events at home and abroad suggest that the British economy may now enter a difficult period with the result that the demand for labour could fall markedly. Will this negate the role of adult compacts? This is unlikely for two reasons.

First, there is still considerable confidence that many parts of the country will escape the worst effects of a possible recession. Furthermore, it has been argued that the structural weaknesses in British industry that were so exposed during the 1980-1 recession are now less apparent. Secondly, the problem of skill shortages exists independently of the size of the available labour pool and many employers have continued to experience recruitment difficulties throughout periods of high unemployment. The very successful Birmingham compacts have taken place within the context of a relatively high local unemployment rate. In other words, whatever the state of local and national labour markets, there is a role for adult compacts.

Programme outcomes - training for jobs or unemployment?

In order to create opportunities for trainees it is important that compacts are concerned with the real employment needs of industry. However, there may be a temptation to devise training programmes focused on specific jobs in specific organisations, and then two problems arise. First, there is the danger that compact graduates who do not find employment with the associated employer will sense failure and become demoralised. Secondly, there is a clear consensus that people must be helped to prepare for a working life which will demand flexibility, initiative and self-reliance; more broad-based skills are needed and there is an expectation that employees should be able to cope with increased responsibility and rapid change in the work environment. Very narrow vocational training will not achieve these ends.

A solution to the first problem might seem to be the negotiation of job guarantees, as in the case of Project Health Care. This approach may well be a helpful aid to recruitment and perhaps would enhance motivation.

In reality, though, very few employers would be willing to offer absolute assurances of employment, and even if they were, such guarantees will still be linked to some criteria against which to judge each trainee's performance on the programme. Consequently, some individuals might still experience failure and then be left with skills suitable for a job they might never have. In any case, as has been pointed out, there is every indication that, at all levels, employment will increasingly demand more of people in terms of their workplace responsibilities and self-development. Job guarantees may be helpful in some contexts but, on the other hand, they may be largely irrelevant and detract from an appreciation of more significant aspects of adult compacts.

Training for employment

In other words, it is not enough to train people for jobs alone; training must prepare the individuals for the demand of lifelong employment. Specific vocational skills are not unimportant but as they are acquired there must be a broader development of appropriate workplace attitudes and habits, and most especially, a fostering of a sense of effective autonomy in trainees. This latter goal reflects a desirable end-aim for both individuals and employers, and it is in this respect that compacts have most to offer because of the psychological significance of the compact as a negotiated relationship which identifies commitments, responsibilities and rights for each participating party, and the importance of this in combatting the negative effects of long-term unemployment.

Helplessness and effectiveness

It is a well established psychological phenomenon that where people are deprived of the opportunity to make decisions which affect their lives, for example long-term institutional care or redundancy and unemployment, they will tend to become increasingly demotivated and apathetic.

In a sense, they have learnt 'helplessness' following a period of failure to effect constructive change in their lives. Research suggests that this learned helplessness can be reversed where people have the opportunity to experience their own effectiveness in the world again and, in particular, where there is a reinstatement of responsibility.

If adult compacts are perceived as negotiated agreements, where each of the parties incurs certain rights, responsibilities and commitments, then there is a unique opportunity to enhance an individual's sense of effectiveness. The Statements of Intent developed for the Loughborough Adult Compact (pp6-8) were especially helpful in this respect by providing a formal acknowledgement that participation entails obligations as well as benefits.

The special contribution that adult compacts can make is their potential to foster a sense of effective autonomy, combating the apathy of learned helplessness on the one hand, and actively encouraging the dispositional qualities which employers are increasingly demanding from their staff on the other. It is in this respect that adult compacts can present the opportunity to raise the quality of provision for the unemployed. Failure to seek this broader goal will result in an impoverished outcome for both the individuals and the employers involved.

Adult compacts - a broad definition

The term 'compact' may be used within an educational context to mean different things at different times. Clearly, though, there has been an assumption throughout the present document that it makes sense to talk specifically of 'adult compacts'. It may already be apparent that an examination of the three case studies will reveal that, despite some differences, they have a number of important features in common. These similarities can, when taken together, inform an understanding of what an adult compact is. This is not to deny that other arrangements may be effective, but in this way a working model of an adult compact can be derived. The principal features include the following:

- **The compact as a negotiated relationship**

It is significant that each party's role within the agreement is made clear with regard to rights and responsibilities. The possible outcomes for both individuals and employers are clear.

- **Aims and objectives**

The common aim is to enhance the employment prospects for the trainees. However, in each case there is concern with long-term career development as well as initial job prospects.

There are a number of objectives common to the three case studies:

- the acquisition of vocationally specific skills;

- the development of more general skills, habits and attitudes which are vital for an effective working life;
- the achievement of nationally recognised vocational qualifications wherever possible;
- a raised awareness among both trainees and employers of the importance of continued career development;
- enhanced job opportunities for compact graduates.

- **Training for skill shortages**

Each of the three case studies has focused on occupational areas which reflect local skill shortages.

- **Short duration of training**

The programmes of training are relatively short, no more than twelve weeks long. The underlying rationale is that end-goals must not be far removed in time if compacts are to motivate trainees.

- **Training off the job**

There is a limited workplace activity and most training takes place off the job. Even the four weeks job rotation that forms part of the Project Healthcare programme is intended to inform trainees' final occupational choice rather than to constitute on-the-job training. This is not to argue that workplace training is ineffective, but from the employers' point of view there are significant hidden costs in staff time and production disruption. In addition, many individuals are suspicious of extended work placements and see them as opportunities for exploitation of free labour.

- **Guidance and counselling**

There is extensive provision for guidance and counselling in each case.

- **Responsiveness to local context**

It can be seen that, within a broad framework, the detailed arrangements for each compact are determined by local circumstances.

Further information

For further information please contact Martin Johnson at FEU (Further Education Unit, Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH). For more copies of the bulletin please contact the FEU Information Centre (address as above). The full report is also available on request from the Information Centre.

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The employer seeks to support the co-operative relationship on which the compact is based.

In particular, the employer will, subject to organisational activity and demands, seek to:

- provide advice and guidance for the design of programmes;
- provide advice and guidance for establishing programme goals;
- provide some direct input to programmes in the form of presentation or practice job interviews;
- provide work experience for participants;
- provide guidance and feedback to participants on work experience;
- provide a reference and/or profile entry for any participant who has completed a period of work experience;
- provide an opportunity for employment following successful completion of the programme and a satisfactory period of work experience;
- prioritise the hiring of compact graduates subject to available vacancies;
- welcome applications for vacancies from successful compact graduates;
- inform the compact of the appropriate vacancies which may arise;
- encourage any compact graduates who are employed to continue to develop their potential via part-time vocational education and training. This may extend to half-day or day release for a limited period and support for tuition fees.

The above constitutes a commitment to support the spirit of the compact which is based on goodwill and an assumption that the other parties (Loughborough College and individual participants) will strive to fulfill their respective Statements of Intent. It is understood that the employer is free to withdraw from the compact according to circumstances.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____

Organisation: _____

The participants seek to support the co-operative relationship on which the compact is based.

In particular, individuals will seek to:

- enter into a programme of vocational education and training;
- enter a period of work experience within the programme;
- strive to attain the general and personal goals identified in the individual action plan;
- appreciate that effectiveness at work depends on more than specific vocational skills, and that other factors, such as attitudes and appropriate work habits are significant;
- appreciate that different working environments may necessitate specific attitudinal or behavioural requirements that are sought by employers;
- explore ways in which the initial compact goals can be built upon in order for the individual to progress and develop.

The above constitutes a commitment to support the spirit of the compact which is based on goodwill and an assumption that the other parties (employers and Loughborough College) will strive to fulfill their respective Statements of Intent. It is understood that the individual is free to withdraw from the compact according to circumstances.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name: _____

Loughborough College seeks to support the co-operative relationship on which the compact is based. In particular, the College will seek to:

- provide a programme of vocational education and training which meets the needs of both employers and the individuals who wish to return to work;
- provide participants with pre-counselling to ensure they clearly appreciate what the programme involves;
- provide guidance and counselling throughout the programme to support each individual's development;
- provide support and referral back-up for those for whom the programme is inappropriate;
- ensure that individuals' achievements are recorded and whenever possible accredited via nationally recognised vocational qualifications;
- facilitate the development of non-vocational skills which are inherent in an effective working life;
- negotiate between employers and individuals while attempting to fairly represent the interests of all parties in the compact;
- ensure that there are opportunities for a satisfactory outcome for all participants, whether in terms of employment with compact employers or further career guidance and advice on alternative means for development and progression;
- evaluate and develop the programme in the light of employers' and participants' experiences.

The above constitutes a commitment to support the spirit of the compact which is based on goodwill and an assumption that the other parties (employers and individual participants) will strive to fulfill their respective Statement of Intent.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____